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at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 2nd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KHAN (Pakistan)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

1. The CHAIRMAN informed the Committee that the group of Eastern European States had nominated Mr. Raichev (Bulgaria) for one of the posts of Vice-Chairman and that the group of African States had nominated Mr. Mohamed (Sudan) for the office of Rapporteur.

2. Mr. Raichev (Bulgaria) was elected Vice-Chairman and Mr. Mohamed (Sudan) Rapporteur by acclamation.

3. The CHAIRMAN said that he had not yet received any nomination for the second post of Vice-Chairman.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK (A/49/250; A/C.2/49/1, A/C.2/49/2; A/C.2/49/L.1 and Add.1)

4. The CHAIRMAN drew the Committee's attention to a letter dated 23 September 1994 from the President of the General Assembly to the Chairman of the Second Committee (A/C.2/49/1) concerning the allocation of items to the Committee, noting that the Assembly had decided that the debate on item 159, entitled "Report of the International Conference on Population and Development", should be held directly in plenary meeting, on the understanding that decisions thereon would be taken in the Second Committee. He also drew attention to the action taken by the General Assembly on the basis of recommendations contained in the first report of the General Committee (A/49/250) concerning the organization of the work of the General Assembly and its Main Committees. In addition, he reminded the Committee of the time-limits established in previous years of 10 minutes for statements on agenda items and 15 minutes for statements during the general debate.

5. He further recalled that the General Assembly had decided to simplify the agenda of the Second Committee and that items were to be considered in clusters, as laid down in annex II to General Assembly resolution 48/162, although that would not rule out the consideration of any specific question that a delegation wished to raise in accordance with the relevant rules of procedure.

6. Mr. KÄÄRIÄ (Finland) questioned the need for a general debate in the Second Committee. Following the adoption of resolution 48/162 by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council had not held a general debate at its 1994 session and the experience had been deemed salutary. The Second Committee would do well to follow suit in order to avoid duplication or triplication of debates. Such a procedure would also help to check the current trend towards treating economic and development issues as secondary items that did not need to be discussed by the ministers in plenary meeting. In that context, his delegation proposed that the general debate in the Second Committee should be eliminated in order to promote debate on economic and development issues at the ministerial level.

7. Mr. RAMOUL (Algeria), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77, said that the agreement reached at the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly to reduce the number of days allocated for the general debate from five to three had already gone some way towards rationalizing the work of the Second Committee. As the Economic and Social Council had done away with its general debate because it overlapped with the debates of the Second Committee, there would be no forum for the discussion of political and economic topics if the general debate in the Committee's general debate was also waived. Given that the time-limits on statements had been strictly adhered to the previous year, the Group of 77 was in favour of retaining the general debate as a useful and constructive exercise in the Second Committee.

8. Mr. FLORENCIO (Brazil) said that his delegation supported the statement by the representative of Algeria: the general debate in the Second Committee should take place.

9. Mr. RUNGE (Germany), speaking on behalf of the European Union, expressed interest in the rationalization of the Committee's work and added that, in the light of the arguments put forward by the Group of 77, he was in favour of a brief general debate during the current session and proposed returning at the end of the session to the question of holding general debates in the Second Committee.

10. Mr. DUGAN (United States of America) expressed support for the observations made by Finland and said that he also appreciated the points made by the other delegations regarding the general debate. His delegation proposed that a very brief general debate should be held, with more effective use made of spokespersons in order to limit the number of statements while at the same time ensuring that the views of all delegations present were represented.

11. Mr. AMAZIANE (Morocco) said he thought that the general debate was very important since it was the only opportunity some delegations, especially those from developing countries, had to take the floor.

12. Ms. KONE (Norway) supported the proposal by Finland, since more time would be available for addressing basic Second Committee issues and holding informal consultations if the general debate was dispensed with.

13. Mr. HAMMARSKJÖLD (Sweden), said that while he supported the Finnish proposal in principle, he felt that, in the light of the views expressed by other delegations, the proposals made by Germany and the United States of America might provide an acceptable solution to the problem.

14. Mr. DOUJAK (Austria) said that the Finnish proposal merited serious consideration, and he hoped that an occasion would be set aside for that purpose, since the idea of eliminating the general debate before taking up the different agenda items would make it possible to focus the debate on those items.

15. Mr. PEDROSO CUESTA (Cuba) said that the idea of dispensing with the general debate should not even be considered, given that the matter had been settled in the General Assembly resolution on restructuring. The general debate was of unique importance in that it allowed countries to state their political views on Second Committee items. It should be noted that the great majority of delegations from developing countries were small and frequently had to attend more than one meeting at a time, and that the general debate provided delegations with a particularly appropriate opportunity to address economic policy issues effectively. Caution should be exercised in relation to proposals such as the one to make greater use of regional spokespersons, a practice already used to considerable effect by the Group of 77. It should be clearly recognized that countries had every right to express their views independently of the regional spokespersons.

16. Mr. KÄÄRIÄ (Finland) said that he had proposed eliminating the general debate, because his delegation was in favour of adhering strictly to the reforms that had been agreed upon. In that regard, he drew attention to resolution 48/162, annex II, paragraph 6, which read: "The debates in the Second Committee should be centred around the items listed in section E below." Section E listed the items that were to be considered by the Second Committee but made no mention of a general debate. However, after listening to the opinions that had been expressed, he was inclined to agree with the proposal to maintain general debate, with the hope that it would be brief and concise, and to evaluate the usefulness of that debate and take up the issue again at a subsequent meeting.

17. Mr. SINGH (India) said that he was in favour of holding a general debate because it appeared to be the only item of interest on the Committee's agenda. As a result of the biennial rotation of items, no matters of importance to the developing countries were to be taken up at the current session. While it was true that the plenary Assembly would discuss some economic issues, it would not analyse them in as much detail as the Second Committee. Moreover, since the Second Committee also allowed for participation at the ministerial level, a general debate in the Committee would mean that the importance of those issues would not be diluted.

18. Mr. MONGBE (Benin) said that, when the restructuring of the United Nations in the economic and social fields had been considered, not a single delegation had wished to eliminate the general debate in the Second Committee. There was no mention in General Assembly resolution 48/162 of its elimination. The general debate did not appear on the list of items to be considered by the Second Committee because it was not an agenda item that needed to be listed. The general debate should be held, because it provided the only context in which small delegations or delegations represented by members of parliament or ministers would have the opportunity to explain the economic policy of their countries and to suggest measures that they felt the Second Committee should adopt in the area of international economic cooperation. He therefore supported the Algerian proposal.

19. The CHAIRMAN said he took it that the Committee wished to hold the general debate, to which five meetings would be allocated between 7 October and

13 October, and he suggested that the matter should be given careful consideration at future sessions.

20. It was so decided.

21. Mr. RAMOUL (Algeria) said he wished to emphasize that holding the general debate should not be subject to any conditions. The general debate was already included in the programme of work and should remain there.

22. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to a letter from the Chairman of the Fifth Committee to the Chairman of the Second Committee (A/C.2/49/2) concerning agenda item 108, "Programme planning", soliciting the opinion of the Second Committee on the proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997. He suggested that he should consult with the officers of the Committee and report to the Second Committee their views as to the best way to approach the matter.

23. Mr. RAMOUL (Algeria), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77, said that under item 88, "Sustainable development and international economic cooperation", the sub-items bore little relation to the concept of sustainability, and he therefore suggested that the word "sustainable" should be deleted. The Group of 77 had decided to request that consideration should be given to the possibility of suspending the Committee's work for one week so that the delegations from the developing countries could hold consultations in preparation for the World Summit for Social Development. On a completely different topic, a question that often arose concerned delays in the issuance of reports; the Group of 77 reserved the right to request that discussions should be postponed in cases where a document was not distributed in time. Lastly, he put forward the possibility of a more logical arrangement of the items to be considered, in order to make the work more streamlined; for example, perhaps the Committee could consider sub-items (a) and (b) of item 87 at the same meeting and sub-items (c) and (d) at another meeting.

24. The CHAIRMAN said that an effort would be made to reorganize the work of the Committee so that during the week of 24 to 28 October the delegations could participate in informal consultations between sessions of the Preparatory Committee.

25. Ms. KELLEY (Secretary of the Committee) explained in connection with item 88 that the term "sustainable development" appeared in resolution 48/162, annex II, paragraph 8, which was why the Secretariat had included it in the title. With regard to the overlap of informal consultations of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit for Social Development and the work of the Committee, if the Committee desired, it would be possible not to schedule meetings for the week of 24 to 28 October and to postpone the item on the environment to the week of 21 November, for which only informal consultations were scheduled.

26. Mr. KÄÄRIÄ (Finland) said that perhaps the Secretariat should include in the programme of work the item of concern to the open-ended working group on operational activities.

27. Mr. BIAOU (Benin) said he supported the suggestion that the Committee should suspend work during the week of 24 to 28 October to allow delegations to participate in informal consultations between sessions of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on Social Development. With reference to sub-item 89 (d) "Elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa", he suggested that since the negotiations on the Convention had been concluded satisfactorily, the debate on the sub-item should be held in the plenary Assembly and the corresponding resolution should be prepared in the Second Committee. He therefore proposed that the Chairman of the Committee should address a letter to that effect to the President of the General Assembly.

28. Mr. JOMAA (Tunisia), Mr. RAMOUL (Algeria), Mrs. MAIKARFI (Niger) supported the Beninese proposal.

29. The CHAIRMAN said that he took it that the Committee wished to adopt the proposal by the representative of Benin that the debate on sub-item 89 (d) should be held directly in plenary, on the understanding that the relevant decisions would be adopted in the Second Committee, and that, to that end, he would transmit a letter to the President of the General Assembly on behalf of the members of the Committee.

30. It was so decided.

31. Mr. KELLOWAY (Australia) said that the informal consultations planned for 3 and 4 November coincided with the renewed 1994 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council and that since the issues to be discussed at those meetings would be very similar, difficulties would arise for many delegations wishing to take part in both meetings; he therefore proposed that the informal consultations should be moved to another date.

32. Mr. STOBY (Director, Division for Policy Coordination and Economic and Social Council Affairs) said that the Secretariat was under the same pressure as delegations and that the programmes of work were the result of proposals formulated and approved by delegations. Moreover, the volume of work was such that it was virtually impossible to change the dates of one meeting without affecting others, which meant that the Secretariat had very little flexibility in that regard.

33. Mr. RAMOUL (Algeria) proposed that the same procedure suggested by the representative of Benin with regard to sub-item 89 (d) should be followed for sub-item 89 (e), entitled "Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States", and that if the General Assembly decided to discuss both sub-items in plenary, they should be considered at the same meeting. Furthermore, on behalf of the Group of 77, he proposed that one day or one half-day should be set aside for informal consultations on sectoral issues in the context of sub-item 89 (e).

34. Mr. RUNGE (Germany) suggested that the proposal to recommend that agenda item 89 (e) should be considered by the General Assembly in plenary should be the subject of further discussion and said that, as a general rule, his delegation believed that the reallocation of Committee items to the plenary should continue to occur only on an exceptional basis.

35. The CHAIRMAN said that he took it that the Committee wished to adopt the proposal by the representative of Germany and that it would consider the possibility of allocating sub-item 89 (e) to the plenary of the General Assembly again at its next meeting.

36. It was so decided.

37. Mr. SERSALE di CERISANO (Argentina), referring to item 4 of the list of additional meetings, said that if the Committee ultimately decided to defer consideration of sub-item 89 (b) until the week beginning 21 November, a consequent change in the dates of the meeting of the bureau of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change.

38. Mr. KELLOWAY (Australia) pointed out that the informal consultations planned for 3 and 4 November could be held on 1 and 2 November without causing much difficulty.

39. Mr. BAILLARGEON (Canada) proposed that sub-item 88 (g) on the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) should be incorporated into item 89, entitled "Environment and Sustainable Development".

40. Mr. BIAOU (Benin) said that item 89 should be entitled "Environment and development" or "Sustainable development", but should by no means be called "Environment and sustainable development", since the concept of sustainable development incorporated economic, social and environmental issues. The current title of item 89 therefore was meaningless, since it would seem to suggest that the environment was a question distinct from sustainable development, whereas in reality it was one of its components. Furthermore, his delegation supported the proposal by the representative of Canada that sub-item 88 (g) should be incorporated in item 89.

41. Ms. KELLEY (Secretary of the Committee), referring to the proposal by the representative of Canada, said that the item on the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) had been included under agenda item 88 pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/162, but that it would not pose problems for the Secretariat if the Committee decided that it was more logical to include the question under item 89. As to the point raised by the representative of Argentina, if the Committee decided to defer consideration of the group of items on the environment until November, the question of the protection of the global climate also would be postponed, since it was a component of that thematic group. With reference to the proposal by the representative of Benin, she pointed out that the title of item 89 likewise had been determined by the General Assembly, and she drew attention to annex II of its resolution 48/162.

42. Mr. JOMAA (Tunisia) said that while he did not oppose the proposal by the representative of Canada to include sub-item 88 (g) under item 89, if the Committee decided to do so it would be necessary to change the title of item 88, since the word "sustainable" in the title applied essentially to the question of human settlements.

43. Mr. SHIBATA (Japan) said that although he had no objection to postponing consideration of item 89 on environment and sustainable development, if it was decided to do so it would be best to defer the entire debate on the item and not divide it into two parts with an interval of over one month between the two.

44. Mr. SINGH (India), supported by Mr. JOMAA (Tunisia) and Mr. PANKIN (Russian Federation), said that if the Committee decided to recommend that sub-items 89 (d) and (e) should be considered by the General Assembly in plenary, item 89 would be substantially shorter. Accordingly, it might be possible to hold meetings on the item on 21 October and complete its consideration over the period 19, 20 and 21 October, thus making it unnecessary to reconsider the item or to reschedule the meetings which had been envisaged for the week of 24 to 28 October.

45. Mr. SERSALE di CERISANO (Argentina) requested convincing arguments for moving Habitat II to item 89. That Conference had its own objective and, moreover, the items on the environment had clearly defined terms of reference. The shift might distort the debate on those items.

46. Mr. BAILLARGEON (Canada) said that he would not insist on his proposal since he understood the reasons expressed by his colleagues to the effect that Habitat II included an important environmental component.

47. The CHAIRMAN said that the Secretariat would make the necessary changes in the light of the suggestions by delegations and that the revised programme of work would be issued as soon as possible for consideration by the Committee at its next meeting.

48. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.